



FELIX MANALO
Courted by Quezon, Roxas, Quirino.

FELIX MANALO

or

ONE FOOT IN HEAVEN

by TEODORO M. LOCSIN

Staff Member

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we said. "Did you have any trouble with the Huks during the last elections?"

"None. In 1946 we were for Roxas and the Huks tried to force us to vote for the Nacionalistas, but last year we had no trouble from them. They left us alone. It was the civil guards who hurt our members when they would not vote for Quirino. We are against the doctrines of the Huks, but not against the Huks as individuals. We have no trouble with them now."

A thought bothered him.

"Now the government is even trying to take away from me the low number (99) of my car!"

He had campaigned for Roxas for President and Quirino for Vice-President in 1946; in 1949 it was Avelino's turn.

"I gave my word to Avelino," he said. "I could not leave him for Quirino. No matter what they did to me. No," said this Avelinista, "I am a man of honor."

Allegiance

If it is true that Manalo commands the allegiance of some 2,000,000 Filipinos, he is indeed a man to be courted by presidents. That he commands the allegiance of that number, or almost that number — our doubt was cleared after we asked him how much the palace and cathedral would cost and he said: "Oh, P3,000,000." The

● AS the spiritual head of the Iglesia ni Cristo, a church that claims some 2,000,000 members, Felix Manalo has an unexpectedly secular look. The white showing at the riots proclaims that the hair of the most formidable rival of the Roman pontiff in the Philippines is dyed. His conversation is rich but earthy, his reading quaint for an ecclesiastic. In his air-conditioned office (there are three air-conditioning units in the small but richly furnished room) are books prominent among which are the complete works of Voltaire and Brann, the Iconoclast.

"As a matter of fact," the head of the church blandly told us, "at one time I stopped believing in God."

He has since changed his views, of course, and he believes in God as much as the next man. But after he had gone through the Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventist faiths (more or less in that order) in fairly rapid succession, it is not to be wondered at if the man should find his faith in established religion somewhat shaken. He solved the problem neatly. Having no faith in the established churches, he decided to establish one of his own. He called it, in a moment of inspiration, the Church of Christ.

Since that time, he has ordained about 2,000 preachers with his own hands, built churches, is building a great cathedral and a palace of uncertain architectural style but of unquestionable magnificence. And, courted by presidents of the Philippines, he has told one of them, Elpidio Quirino, in so many words, to go to hell.

That is his story, anyway. A staunch Avelinista, Manalo was offered by Quirinistas P200,000 to see the light. He turned the offer down.

Four times prominent Quirinistas asked the man whom the late President Quezon reverently addressed as "Bishop," although Manalo disclaims the title and prefers to call himself merely the executive minister of God, to set a date when President Quirino could see him. The short, swart, stocky head of the Iglesia ni Cristo, his heart rankling with the indignities and injuries suffered by his followers at the hands of civil guards who were proselytizing among them for Quirino with both ends of the gun, declared:

"I'll vote for almost any candidate rather than for Quirino!"

Shock

When we expressed shock at such censorable language, Manalo said:

"Why, who is Quirino? He is a man just the same as I am. I am not afraid of him. Show fear to no man—that is the best way to defend your rights." Members of my church

were beaten up, some killed, because they refused to vote for Quirino. If there had been a truly free election—

"Yes," we interrupted him breathlessly, "who do you think would have won?"

"Avelino, of course."

"No kidding?"

"Of course, Avelino would have won. Not that I have anything personal against Quirino," he added, and pointed to a photograph of Quirino on the top of a bookcase. The photograph bore a very affectionate dedication from the President to his dear friend, Felix Manalo. "No, I have nothing personal against Quirino, or anyone. We are all brothers. I am against a wrong doctrine or practice, never against a man. I am not the enemy of any man. But when I am attacked, I fight. That's why I like the Free Press; it is not afraid to fight. Do you need subscriptions? How about a thousand subscriptions?"

"Never mind about subscriptions,

two buildings, plus the swimming pool between them, looked as though they would cost, easily, that much. The palace would be air-conditioned—completely. The pillars are of narra, the floor of special wood, the bathrooms are fit for a king.

"Nothing like them in the country," said Manalo as he pointed out, with simple pride, the special features. "I had them ordered directly from the United States."

Surely, only a flock numbering about 2,000,000 could support Manalo in such magnificence.

In his office we paused to admire a splendid set of chairs. They were of dark and very hard wood, inlaid with mother-of-pearl.

"They are very beautiful," we observed, wondering how much the set cost.

"They are yours," Manalo said with a grandly indifferent gesture. "Where shall I have them delivered?"

"No, no, no," we said weakly.

And the many churches he had built in many parts of the islands, several in Manila alone, the rest in Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao, further lent credence to the claim of a 2,000,000-membership.

Yet, at the beginning of his apostolate, Manalo, after a hard day's work, would come home to a supper of rice and salt. He has indeed made good. For a man who at one time did not believe in God, he has made much in the Lord's name. He still speaks of Voltaire, who had wrecked his faith, with some affection; thus one might speak of a mistress one has forsworn but not entirely forgotten. It was good while it lasted.

Faith

Having recovered his faith, Manalo set up his first church in Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila, in 1914. After that,



CLOSE-UP OF MANALO
Not a bishop.



ERASMO MANALO
Successor?